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ABSTRACT

The three major issues in the education of exceptional adults as perceived by 40 state directors of adult education were identified through use of a questionnaire. Exceptional adults were defined as individuals 18 years of age or older who suffer from some mental handicap, such as mental retardation, brain damage, or psychological abnormality (mental illness). Responses to the questionnaire were tabulated, classified, and analyzed. The respondents cited 26 different specific issues in education for exceptional adults. The issues fall into six categories: those that are client centered; those that are curriculum centered; those that are institutional centered; those that are personnel centered; those that are financial; and those that are societal. The range in the number of times each categorical area was cited was from a high of 14 for the financial classification to a low of 6 for societal issues; client-centered issues were cited 12 times; curriculum issues 11 times; personnel issues 10 times; and institutional-centered issues 9 times. (Author/DB)

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MAJOR ISSUES IN THE EDUCATION OF EXCEPTIONAL ADULTS AS PERCEIVED BY STATE DIRECTORS OF ADULT EDUCATION

by

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the major issues in the education of exceptional adults as perceived by state directors of adult education.

Significance

There appears to be a slightly increasing awareness of the need for providing educational opportunities for exceptional adults. (5) The trend seems to be a part of the larger recognition and acceptance of increasing educational opportunity for all. However, recognition of the desirability of providing educational opportunity for exceptional adults is only one step in the long process of developing and implementing such educational programs. Therefore, the significance of this study will in part be determined by how well it reflects the perceptions of state directors of adult education concerning major issues in providing educational opportunity for exceptional adults.

It is worthwhile to identify and study perceptions because they often reflect phenomena that guide and influence behaviors. It is equally valuable to be concerned with the perceptions of the state directors of adult education because of the influence these educational leaders have in statewide programs.

Definition

For the purposes of this study, exceptional adults were identified as individuals 18 years of age or older who suffer from some mental handicap

AA0140 85

such as mental retardation, brain damage, or psychological abnormality (mental illness).

Procedures

Procedures employed in this study were simple and straightforward. A questionnaire was developed to secure a variety of information from state directors. A directory was used to identify these directors. Following the identification process, the responses to the questionnaire, which among other things asked, "What are the 3 major issues in the education of exceptional adults that must be resolved in your state?", were then tabulated, classified, and analyzed.

Findings

Forty state directors of adult education responded to the survey; 27 of the respondents reported their states provide educational services for exceptional adults. The respondents cited 26 different specific issues in the education of exceptional adults in their states. The issue of funding was cited the most often--14 times. Problems of adequately prepared personnel to teach the exceptional adult was cited 9 times and curriculum problems were cited 7 times.

The 26 different specific issues cited by the respondents appear to fall into 6 categories: issues that are client centered, issues that are curriculum centered, issues that are institutional centered, issues that are personnel centered, issues that are financial, and finally issues that are societal. Some of the individual issues are difficult to classify and another writer might have classified them differently.

Examples

Examples of some of the issues cited by the state directors are provided below. The examples are listed according to the classification system developed by the author.

Client-centered issues

1. Concerns of how to identify exceptional adults
2. Concerns of how to assess needs
3. Concerns of how to recruit the exceptional adult or how to get services to those who need them
4. Concerns about job placement
5. Concerns about transportation
6. Concerns about meeting broader personal and social needs
7. Concerns of retention

Curriculum-centered issues

1. Concerns of how to develop what kind of program for the exceptional adult
2. Concerns of program articulation
3. Concerns about curriculum design
4. Concerns about curriculum for post high school student
5. Concerns about definition of "terminal" program for the exceptional adult

Institutional-centered issues

1. Concerns about how to identify "responsible" institution
2. Concerns about coordination of administration
3. Concerns about "standards"
4. Concerns about facilities, equipment and supplies
5. Concerns about availability of materials

Personnel-centered issues

1. Concerns about skills and availability of instructional staff
2. Concerns about useful volunteers

Financial-centered issues

1. Concerns about coordination of funding
2. Concerns about general level of funding, funding procedures, and use of funds.

Societal-centered issues

1. Concerns about the awareness of the need for, or desirability of, education for exceptional adults
2. Concerns about public acceptance and awareness of the potential of exceptional adults to live and work in the community
3. Concerns about public attitude of, "Is education for the exceptional adult really worthwhile?"

There is little difference in the number of times each categorical area was cited. The range is from a high of 14 for the financial classification to a low of 6 for societal issues. Client-centered issues were cited 12 times; curriculum issues, 11 times; personnel issues, 10 times; and institutional-centered issues, 9 times.

Funding issues generally concerned the problem of too little money. Societal issues were concerned with the problem of awareness, acceptance and value of educational opportunity for exceptional adults. Client-centered issues included identification, recruitment and placement questions. Curriculum issues concerned program design, articulation and content. Institutional issues included questions for which institutions are responsible; administrative problems related to the previous problem; and problems of "standards" of service facilities, supplies and materials. Personnel issues revolve around the training, educational preparation and competence of teachers of exceptional adults.

Conclusions

The perceptions of major issues in the education of exceptional adults held by the respondents are heavily weighted in favor of the "operational" issues: funding, administration, curriculum development, identification and placement. Perhaps such a perspective reflects the operational nature of state departments of education. However, the relatively low profile of societal issues may be cause for some concern. The relatively low concern for societal dimensions of the area may be explained by one of two conditions: (1) state directors of adult education are philosophically committed to the idea of providing educational opportunities for the exceptional adult and therefore do not perceive such programs as being public issues, or (2) state directors of adult education are not aware of the potential controversy that may philosophically surround the question. In either case it appears the respondents' perceptions concerning the societal questions may not reflect the societal issues as reflected in mental retardation literature.

The literature concerned with the education of adult mental retardates (1, 2, 3, 5) suggests that social policy of the federal and state governments does not adequately provide for the education of mentally retarded adults because of questions of net social and economic value of such programs. Such a policy position would likely contribute to the problems associated with the operational issues perceived by the state directors. For example, as long as there is a question of the net social and/or economic value of such programs (and as long as these criteria guide the development of priorities), funding difficulties may be expected. Furthermore, funding difficulties may contribute to difficulties in other areas such as curriculum, personnel, and clientele.

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